

# WFG Informational Bulletin

To: All Pennsylvania Policy Issuing Agents of WFG National Title Insurance Company  
From: WFG Underwriting Department  
Date: December 8, 2022  
Bulletin No.: PA 2022-05  
Subject: A Lien for Inheritance Taxes Revealed a Suspicious Deed

---

When the owners of a property are deceased, problems can arise as the heirs deal with the property. Whether the family is trying to minimize costs, or bad actors want to assume the deceased's identity, there can be incentives to improperly avoid the probate process. When examining a property's title, it is important to be mindful of "red flags" that will prompt further investigation. A recent title search by WFG illustrated some clues that lead to discovery of a possibly invalid deed:

The seller in a cash transaction had recently purchased the single-family home by deed from a married couple. The examiner noticed that there was a lien filed by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Revenue for Inheritance Taxes owed by the Estate of one of the married couple. The Inheritance Tax Lien was filed 5 years before the deed was allegedly signed by the decedent. The examiner also noticed that the signature of the prior owner didn't match the signature from a previous deed, and that it appeared the same individual had signed the vesting deed for both prior owners. Further investigation led to the discovery of an online obituary indicating that both prior owners may have been deceased for over a decade. A search of Pennsylvania's Notary database also showed that the name and commission number for the Notary listed on the vesting deed did not match a commissioned Notary. Another indicator was that the Statement of Value filed with the vesting deed stated that it was a "distressed property".

Some takeaways from this scenario:

- Be mindful of the types of record matters filed against the property, and whether they make sense given the chain of title.
- Compare signatures with prior documents of record, and within the documents.
- Pennsylvania's Department of State provides an online Notary search (<https://www.notaries.pa.gov/Pages/NotarySearch.aspx>), and other States do as well.
- Be wary of transactions and prior conveyances that appear to be under duress (such as distressed sales, flips, pending foreclosures or tax sales, far below market value conveyances, etc.).

While some red flags will have good explanations, their existence should at least lead to a moment of pause and possibly further investigation. The more red flags that exist regarding a single property or transaction, the more likely something is amiss or a claim will be filed. As always, please contact Underwriting if you have any questions or concerns.

**NOTE:** This Bulletin should not be interpreted as reflecting negatively upon the character of an individual or entity mentioned herein and is for the sole purpose of establishing underwriting positions and policies reflecting WFG National Title Insurance Company's best business judgment. The information contained in this Bulletin is intended solely for the use of employees of WFG National Title Insurance Company, its title insurance agents and approved attorneys. Disclosure to any other person is expressly prohibited unless approved in writing by the WFG National Title Insurance Company's Underwriting Department.

**The Agent may be held responsible for any loss sustained as a result of the failure to follow the standards set forth above.**